

# What Works Clearinghouse



## Character Education

September 14, 2006

## Voices Literature and Character Education Program

### Program description

*Voices Literature and Character Education Program (Voices LACE;* formerly known as *Voices of Love and Freedom and Literacy and Values*) is a K–12 program that aims to promote positive character and citizenship values, literacy skills, and social skills. The program contains a curriculum that can be used over any length of time. During classroom lessons, students read books about such everyday issues as ethnic discrimination, fighting, and bullying, and elaborate on central themes through role-playing and discussions practiced in school and at home. Emphasis is given

to promoting caring relationships between teachers and students and among students and to connecting the values taught through students' personal stories. *Voices LACE* may also be implemented as a schoolwide improvement program. Optional components of the program include schoolwide events and restructuring of school organization and practices (establishing student assemblies and creating small learning communities), parental involvement (home visits and family nights), and community support (joint campaigns with supporting organizations and business).

### Research

One study of *Voices LACE* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations. The study, which included 100 sixth- and seventh-grade students from five

middle schools in one school district in Cambridge, Massachusetts, examined results on students' knowledge, attitudes, and values.<sup>1</sup>

### Effectiveness

*Voices Literature and Character Education Program* was found to have no discernible effects on middle school students' knowledge, attitudes, and values.

	<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Knowledge, attitudes, and values</i>	<i>Academic achievement</i>
<b>Rating of effectiveness</b>	Not reported	No discernible effects	Not reported
<b>Improvement index<sup>2</sup></b>	Not reported	Average: +6 percentile points Range: +6 percentile points	Not reported

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on the available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available. The findings in the one study meeting standards with reservations pertain to the Voice LACE curriculum rather than the whole school improvement model.

2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings in the one study reviewed.

## Additional program information

### Developer and contact

Zaner-Bloser/Voices Programs. 217 California Street Newton, MA 02458. Web: [www.zaner-bloser.com](http://www.zaner-bloser.com). Email addresses of sales consultants vary by state and are available on the developer's website. Telephone: 617-964-3503.

### Scope of use

*Voices LACE*, established in 1992, has been adopted by more than 750 urban, suburban, and rural schools around the country with varying demographic characteristics. The *Voices LACE* program may have changed since the studies were conducted. The WWC recommends asking the developer for information about the most current version of this program and taking into account that student demographics and school context may affect outcomes.

### Teaching

*Voices LACE* uses children's literature to help students develop positive character and civic values, multicultural understanding, literacy skills, and social skills. The program emphasizes promoting caring relationships between teachers and students and among students and to connecting the values taught through students' personal stories. The curriculum was designed for grades K–12, with developmentally appropriate lesson duration and content. The core curriculum was designed to be integrated into existing reading, writing, language arts, health, or social studies classes. For each grade level, the curriculum includes multicultural stories and written teacher resources that provide suggestions on how to integrate the teaching of character education and violence prevention into existing classes. Using this curriculum, students explore and practice such core values as honesty, fairness, perseverance, hard work, courage, loyalty, trust, responsibility, and self-discipline. An alternative curriculum for grades K–3, *Voices Reading*, combines elements of a core reading program with multicultural literature organized by themes. For grades K–3, there are picture books that the teacher reads aloud to

the students. For grades 3–6, there are three to five books per theme, including at least one chapter book that can be read aloud or used for shared reading. There are student books to practice social and literacy skills.

Schools may choose to adopt *Voices School Design*, which may include schoolwide practices, parental involvement, and community support. Schools adopting *Voices School Design* incorporate core values into their mission statements and work to create supportive classroom and school environments. Schoolwide practices may include staff professional development, student assemblies and displays of student work inside and outside the classroom, a counseling program, and small learning communities. The parental involvement component may include potluck dinners or breakfasts with families, family nights, a parent involvement team, individual parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and homework support by parents. The community support component may include joint campaigns with supporting organizations and business and an after-school reading program.

The developer provides institutes to introduce the school to the *Voices LACE* curricula and *Voices School Design*. Professional development includes one-day introductory training and multiple days of on-site coaching and modeling of *Voices LACE* lessons in classrooms.

### Cost

A teacher resource guide costs \$19.99. There are approximately 10 teacher resource guides with accompanying trade books per grade level for grades K–4, 6 teacher guides with books per grade level for grades 5–8, and 2 teacher resource guides with books per grade level for grades 9–12. The accompanying children's story books range in cost from \$4–\$8 for paperback titles and \$10–\$20 for hardcovers. Middle and high school books are available only in paperback. Multiple copies of the literature (one copy per student) are necessary to implement the program in grades 6–12. Teacher training costs \$1,400 a day plus expenses.

**Research** Eleven studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of the *Voices Literature and Character Education Program*. One study (Demetriades-Guyette, 2002) of the impact on middle school students of the *Voices LACE* curriculum in a 12-week implementation<sup>3</sup> (Literacy and Values) was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. The other 10 studies did not meet WWC evidence standards.

The Demetriades-Guyette study included 100 students from five middle schools in one school district in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Outcomes for students receiving *Voices LACE* were compared with those for students in schools that did not use this program. The study focused on *Voices LACE* as implemented in classrooms rather than as a schoolwide intervention.

## Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of character education addresses student outcomes in three domains: behavior; knowledge, attitudes, and values; and academic achievement.

*Knowledge, attitudes, and values.* Demetriades-Guyette examined two outcomes in this domain but did not find statistically significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups. These findings were confirmed by the WWC. The average effect size across the two outcomes in this domain was neither statistically significant nor substantively important using WWC criteria.<sup>4</sup>

## Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates interventions as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC), the size of the differences between participants in the intervention condition and the comparison condition, and the consistency of the findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

## The WWC found *Voices Literature and Character Education Program* to have no discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values<sup>5</sup>

### Improvement index

For each outcome domain, the WWC computed an improvement index based on the effect size (see the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison

condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for knowledge, attitudes, and values is +6 percentile points.

3. The developer notes that there is no required minimum length and intensity of program delivery. But both the developer and the study author recommend a long-term implementation using multiple program components to substantially affect students' thinking and behavior. Currently, there is no research evidence that met WWC standards and examined a long-term full implementation of the *Voices LACE* program.

4. The level of statistical significance was calculated by the WWC and corrects for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate statistical significance. In the case of the *Voices* report, no corrections for clustering or multiple comparisons were needed.

5. The one study that met WWC standards with reservations (Demetriades-Guyette, 2002) also examined student outcomes in the behavior domain. Student behavior outcome measures were not reviewed because of incomplete statistical information.

**The WWC found *Voices Literature and Character Education Program* to have no discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values<sup>3</sup> (continued)**

**Summary**

The WWC reviewed 11 studies on *Voices LACE*. One study met WWC standards with reservations. This study used a quasi-experimental design that assessed middle school student outcomes in the knowledge, attitudes, and values domain. Both outcomes examined in this domain were not statistically significant. When the WWC aggregated the results in this domain

the average effect size was neither statistically significant nor substantively important. The WWC rated the program as having no discernible effects on knowledge, attitudes, and values. Character education, an evolving field, is beginning to establish a research base. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

**References**

**Met WWC evidence standards with reservations**

Demetriades-Guyette, A. (2002). Patterns of change in the social-cognitive development of middle school children following a school-based multicultural literature program. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(05B), 2615. (UMI No. 3052695)

**Did not meet WWC evidence screens**

- Bol, L., Ross, S. M., Nunnery, J. A., & Alberg, M. S. (2002). A comparison of teachers' assessment practices in school restructuring models by year of implementation. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 7(4), 407–423.<sup>6</sup>
- Calaway, F. (2001). *Evaluation of the comprehensive school reform models in the Memphis City Schools*. Memphis, TN: Memphis City Schools Office of Research and Evaluation.<sup>6</sup>
- Daiute, C., Stern, R., & Lelutiu-Weinberger, C. (2002a). Negotiating violence prevention. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(1), 83–101.<sup>6</sup>
- Daiute, D., & Buteau, E. (2002b). Writing for their lives: Children's narrative supports for physical and psychological well being. In S. J. Lepore & J. M. Smyth (Eds.), *The writing cure: How expressive writing promotes health and emotional well-being* (pp.53–73). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.<sup>6</sup>

- Koh, M. S., & Robertson, J. S. (2003). School reform models and special education. *Education and Urban Society*, 35, 421–442.<sup>6</sup>
- Ross, S. M., & Lowther, D. L. (2003). Impacts of the Co-nect school reform design on classroom instruction, school climate, and student achievement in inner-city schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 8(2), 215–246.<sup>6</sup>
- Selman, R. L. (1998). *Research and practice in the promotion of intergroup relations in schools*. Boston, MA: Harvard University, The Group for the Study of Interpersonal Development.<sup>7</sup>
- Suriani M. M., & Wasson, R. (1994, November). *Assessment of an intervention addressing literacy and ethics*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Nashville, TN.<sup>6</sup>
- Wasson, R., Anderson, R., Huffman, S., & Suriani, M. (1995). *The implementation of Voices Literature and Character Education Program: A summative report*. Memphis, TN: The University of Memphis, Center for Research in Educational Policy.<sup>6</sup>
- Wasson, R., Huffman, S. B., Burr-McNeal, B., & Kenney, G. (1994). *Development and piloting of the prosocial attitude bank*. Memphis, TN: The University of Memphis, Center for Research in Educational Policy.<sup>8</sup>

**For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Voices Literature and Character Education Program Technical Appendices](#).**

6. Does not use a strong causal design: the study did not use a comparison group.

7. Does not use a quantitative design: this study used a qualitative approach to report findings.

8. Does not use a strong causal design: the study, which used a quasi-experimental design, did not establish that the comparison group was equivalent to the treatment group at the baseline.